

Pan Flu & Us: Linking Home Care and Public Health Lessons Learned

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In general, the Montgomery County APC's conference on home care and pandemic flu was a great success. The correct target audience was reached, with a mixture of certified home health agencies, home care agencies and residential service agencies in attendance.

More than 90 percent of the participants agreed that after the program they could explain to home care clients how to prepare for a pandemic. Participants also recognized the impact a pandemic flu could have on their organizations and could explain the necessity of preparedness.

The conference was successful at introducing public health to a population who might not have understood exactly what the local health department does or its role in a pandemic.

We learned that many home care agencies had not considered how a pandemic flu would impact their services. Therefore, there is a great need for programs like this in the home care community. Participants expressed a desire for more time to network with one another to discuss cooperation and ways they could plan together.

Home care agencies have many demands on their time. Be conscious of their schedules when planning your event and be willing to accommodate their client schedules as well as the numerous other meetings and workshops they must attend.

There is a high level of turnover among the smaller agencies, including the RSAs (Residential Service Agencies) and home care agencies. Many of these organizations operate on small budgets with small staff. We received a significant number of returned mailings from addresses that were no longer in business.

There is a temptation to pack the agenda with speaker presentations because, after all, there is a lot of information to impart and you are cognizant of imposing on your participants' time. But do try to include an active learning piece if possible. Your participants will appreciate the break from the lecture format and adult learning principles advise that exercises and hands-on experiences are proven to be effective teaching methods.

Finally, partnerships are critical in developing this type of conference for home care agencies. However, be aware of the limitations on some of your potential partners. Some agencies may have a staff of a single individual who works largely with an unpaid board of directors. In summary, do work with others. But pick your partners wisely. Your program will benefit from having their input. And be careful of asking too much of anyone who already has a very full plate.

